

# Embracing Plurality

Collaboration, Complexity and Challenge

A paper for discussion at

*Embracing Plurality*  
*Challenges of Research on Social Issues*

A workshop for social science researchers

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The following members of the Royal Society of New Zealand Social  
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## **1. Introduction**

Social researchers are a diverse set of professionals involved in work that transcends disciplinary and institutional boundaries and involves a variety of collaborative partnerships. The environment in which we pose questions, develop research strategies and generate information is increasingly complex and involves interaction with a multiplicity of stakeholders. We negotiate these challenges at a time of intensified competition for contestable research funds. Many researchers are responding creatively and experimentally to these challenges and opportunities. The RSNZ and UNESCO Embracing Plurality Workshop is an opportunity to discuss collaborative social research practices that are plural with respect to those who pose the questions, design the research, generate new ideas and information and interpret the findings. It brings together researchers, policy advisers and end-users to focus on forms of research practice that in various ways 'embrace plurality'.

This discussion paper focuses on some of the challenges of diversity and the complexities of collaboration across differences in a shifting funding context. It starts with a recognition of diversity among social researchers and concludes with attention to strategies to enhance linkages at local, national and international levels between the social researchers located in government agencies, private companies, local government, the voluntary sector, tertiary education and non-governmental social service organisations.

The paper is a work-in-progress, articulating some of the issues considered at meetings of the RSNZ Social Science Committee and during informal conversations among members of the Committee. An expanded version of this paper will be available on the Royal Society of New Zealand website in the next few months. It will be informed by workshop presentations and the reflections of workshop participants. The aim is not to provide 'a' RSNZ Social Science Committee view on the issues it addresses. It represents the diverse positions and disciplinary backgrounds of those on the committee and is directed at better communication and more reflexive practice in the social sciences.

## **2. Plurality among researchers - Can we collaborate among ourselves?**

**Raewyn Good**

Social researchers are found in universities, government departments/ministries, private sector firms, community agencies, and local government. Some are volunteers, others on salaries; a significant number are self-employed contractors. There has been relatively little dialogue across the sectors or employment movement between them. Some researchers receive salaries and scramble for scarce research funds, while others have to scramble for funds to cover both salary and research project costs. Some experience pressure to publish, while others experience the opposite. Some have spent years within one discipline or sub-discipline, while for others disciplinary boundaries are irrelevant. Some limit themselves to a particular methodology and associated techniques, while others are skilled in a range of approaches and techniques. Some usually work alone, or with a very few others at key points, while others work in teams much of the time. Some have knowledge of one culture and language and a

few groupings within that, while others have depth in two or more cultures and fluency in several languages. Some have years of technical training and loads of experience, others less of either, and some have much experience, but less training.

In other words, “social researchers” is a term applied to a very diverse group. Yet, we are lumped together because we are interested in the “social” (rather than the physical or the biological) and because we “research” – find things out and organise/analyse/report/advise/disseminate information. And since we are diverse, so is the range and scope of what we do. Our subject matter is ourselves – humans and the systems, behaviours, processes and beliefs of humans. And who speaks, and what is spoken, is often contested. Social researchers are a small gaggle of voices among many commentators on aspects of human/social.

Achieving a “fair share of the sunshine” has usually involved some form of collective action over a period of time. Social researchers generally feel that our share of the sunshine (resources, social standing etc) is insufficient. There have been many initiatives and reviews and alterations to systems in an attempt to achieve improvements. Recent initiatives involve strengthening linkages; and underpinning that is the obvious need to strengthen our understanding of each other and respect our differences. Some of this involves making another effort to reduce the barriers that have bedeviled social research in this country for some years. (See Lunt & Davidson, 2002 for a detailed historical discussion of shifts relating to applied social research between 1970 and 2002).

At the **structural level**, there have been numerous reviews that have had implications for social researchers (the Hawke report, OWGASS, Foresight, the reorganization of FRST, TEAC etc.). All these reviews were aimed at a better alignment of demand and supply – working smarter with the scarce resources. This has included moves to involve end users of research in the research funding decision process and to connect policy, research and practice as part of the drive to improve the evidence base for policy. It has involved the funding of multi-disciplinary, multi-method projects informed by more than one conceptual paradigm. Professional organisations have developed that span the academic disciplines (the Australasian Evaluation Society and the Association of Social Science Researchers), and, while there is not an encompassing social science Centre for Research Excellence, numerous research centres have developed in tertiary institutions that cut across old academic boundaries. There is increased understanding and awareness of concepts such as sustainability and a growing appreciation of Mātauranga Māori, Kaupapa Māori, and Fa’a Samoa. There are also initiatives like the cross-departmental Social Policy Evaluation and Research Committee (SPEaR) that is directed at coordinating social research efforts across the state sector.

Then there are **our hearts and minds and individual actions and choices** - our life experiences and the approaches we have absorbed in growing, training and ageing. Our location (in government agencies, local government, the voluntary sector, tertiary education) has had a considerable influence on our perceptions of our selves as researchers and of those located in different sectors. Those in universities tend to assume that researchers in government departments are “policy people”, but they actually undertake a considerable amount of research (more perhaps than academics with heavy teaching loads). Much of this research is not apparent through library or

Internet searches. Mapping work being undertaken for the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Committee (SPEaR) reveals considerably more current research activity in the social policy agencies than that funded by FRST, the HRC and the Marsden Fund combined and multiplied. This is both in-house and research that is contracted out. However, if publications in journals and books are used to estimate activity levels (and they seem to form a proxy measure in the tertiary education sector), then it is no wonder that some university-based researchers consider their sector undertakes most of the social research done in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Government agency based social researchers often refer to university based social researchers as “teachers” rather than researchers, and it is true that teaching can dominate their time and that teaching loads are generally increasing. It is also true that many also undertake research and supervise research and that more research would be undertaken if access to research funding improved. And it is also true that publication is encouraged and rewarded in the tertiary education sector, and those in other sectors wonder how so many publications can be obtained from some slender pieces of work.

At the heart of some of the differences between social researchers located in government agencies and the tertiary education sector is a key distinction between grants and contracts. A **grant** usually enables someone to obtain resources to undertake a project/process of research that the researcher has initiated. The researcher has convinced the funder of the merits of the project and has considerable autonomy as to the research direction and the outcomes. A **contract** is much tighter; the funder wants to know something quite specific and the process and product are agreed for a particular price. The funder expects that product, and may withhold some funds if the researcher does not meet the contract specifications. The researcher can choose not to engage, but once engaged, is expected to deliver what was agreed.

Policy agencies generally work in the contract mode, whether a project is contracted out or undertaken by social researchers in the employ of the agency. Some do operate limited grant arrangements. Others in the non-tertiary sector are used to contracts, and grants are rare. Grants rather than contracts have dominated the tertiary sector research funding scene for some years and this is changing towards the contracting model – with internal and external drivers. Trying to contract with those used to grants and achieve a satisfactory outcome all round is challenging, but increasingly necessary.

**Publication rights** are an important aspect that needs to be explored and resolved before contracts are signed. What are the funder's rights versus professional ethics and the protection of confidentiality? I argue that the researcher's notebooks, and the identity behind the interview number on the notes, do not belong to the employer or funder, but the draft reports and the right to publish the eventual report in journals are different issues. And those who have salaries, whether they win a contract or not, need to understand that the basic income of those without salaries needs to be funded out of the research contract – in other words the **price should be adequate for the tasks** and not rely on voluntary input to ensure quality.

**How can we avoid “talking past one another”** and undermining potential collaborative partnerships between researchers in diverse locations? How can

knowledge exclusive to one sector be shared with others? There are initiatives underway at developing “best practice” guidelines, through SPEaR, and via professional trans-disciplinary associations. There are existing Codes of Ethics and people in a range of agencies with experience in their practical application. And some researchers in government agencies jointly supervise postgraduate theses and have strong connections across these different environments. We have the opportunity for communication at workshops like this and web-based linkages are planned to complement personal networks and newsletters.

**Collaboration among researchers is about building and maintaining and sustaining ongoing relationships that are not artificially fractured by employment locale.** Our sector is small, we tend to know each other or know someone who would know, and reputations are long in the building but quick to be trashed. Today is about showcasing and sharing where we are moving as a sector - and where we need to move or are being driven. It is about choices and trusting difference as well as respecting our differences and celebrating our diversity as social researchers.

### **3. Plurality, complexity and the research process** **Julie Warren**

Social researchers, like researchers in general, often find it difficult to accommodate the complexity of the world and, therefore, the complexity of the problems that may prompt research, in the design and implementation of their research. One dimension of this complexity is the almost infinite **diversity within and between communities**, associated with cultural, ethical, socio-economic, age, gender, political, and other differences. Another dimension, which is often overlooked by social scientists, is the **interaction between communities and their natural and built environment**, which requires research that includes consideration of factors such as the natural resource base and its past and current value and use (including conflicts amongst users); environmental impacts of human activity; the implications of climate change; energy availability and use; heritage, cultural and conservation values; and approaches to sustainable development.

Researchers need to ensure these complexities explicitly inform key components of the research process, including the formulation of the aims and objectives of the research, the composition of the research team, the development of the research questions, the design of the research approach, the implementation of the research and the distribution of research findings, including the forms of research outputs. These components of the research approach will also be shaped by the needs of the research sponsor. The ways that these components of the research could reflect the complexity referred to above are fairly self-evident. Some of these are discussed briefly below.

**Research aims and objectives:** Given cultural or ethnic, socio-economic, gender and other differences within and between communities, the aims and objectives of research (depending on its focus) could focus on the distribution of costs and benefits, the cultural appropriateness of service delivery, the absolute or relative needs of different groups, the sustainable management of resources, the optimal management of resources for recreational, conservation and economic outcomes, etc.

**Composition of the research team:** The set of circumstances leading to a research response, the aims and objectives of the research, the composition of the population relevant to the research, nature of research teams, and such like, will determine the required composition of the research in the **research design, implementation and analysis phases**. If the research problem involves issues specific to Maori or Pacific Island, for instance, researchers with the appropriate cultural understanding and skills would need to be involved from the earliest planning stages. The same goes for action-oriented research, where research participants would also need to be involved in the research from the design phase. Research that relates to people and their interaction with the environment would require a multi-disciplinary team that, for instance, includes researchers from the social and physical sciences as well as economists, planners and lawyers. Indeed, researchers with some legal skills are required across a wide range of research topics. It would also require a conceptual framework and research approach that enables the integration of the different values, theory and methods that the different disciplines and cultures may bring to the team and that are required to fully understand what is happening in the real world. Community development, social impact assessment and soft systems theory are all helpful in this regard, but need further development as a wider range of social researchers grapple with dimensions of complexity.

Part of these tasks would also include identifying the **research stakeholders**, who could include particular groups within communities, iwi, local, regional and central government, social, health and other service providers, developers, NGOs, particular industry sectors and so on. This could occur in the design phase of the research and continue throughout the research with community participants' input.

**Distribution of research findings and research outputs:** The audiences for the research findings, and the form in which they are presented, will depend on the research stakeholders – identified during the design and implementation phases. Because these research stakeholders are likely to use the research findings in different ways, they will require different oral and written outputs at different stages of the research process. These outputs need to be prepared with the research users in mind, which means they need to be in accessible and appropriate language and format. Formats could include newsletters, reference groups, community workshops and hui, oral presentations, written reports, magazine articles and so on.

One example of research that tries to address the complexity of New Zealand society is a FRST funded 4-year programme entitled *Integrated planning and management of natural areas for tourism related activities*. The research aims to develop an approach to planning and managing natural areas that enables full consideration of social, economic, cultural, environmental and other factors in decision making about tourism related and other commercial and non-commercial activities. The research team is interdisciplinary, including members with sociology, resource management, ecology, economics and planning backgrounds. It also includes a Maori researcher whose PhD research focuses on how Maori ethics, values and practice shape tourism business structures and practice.

#### 4. Addressing Complexity – Collaboration with Maori Tania Rangiheuea

**Maori society (like all others) is multiply defined**, with its own specificities and peculiarities. This means that any collaboration with Maori must be philosophically and functionally oriented to accommodate a wide range of values, perspectives and contradictions. The complexities of Maori society, however, do not necessarily mean that the process of engaging Maori in the research and policy process itself should be complex. Development goals of Maori organisations and tribes, for example, provide a useful framework and basis for engaging with Maori. Underpinning Maori development goals is a matrix of interrelated and interdependent customary concepts. An effective collaboration involving Maori can be achieved through a mutual understanding of values, customs and goals and a willingness to be responsive to them. Furthermore, there is now a reasonable level of knowledge about Maori communities sufficient for social researchers to establish contact and a working relationship with them. The challenge, however, is to develop a depth of knowledge from the research process that would satisfy the respective goals of the Maori community and social researcher. These goals, however, need not be mutually exclusive and research programmes that have the capacity for **recognising the diversity of Maori communities** and potential for collaboration with them are preferred. The task of developing a research programme that employs collaborative strategies needs to work out the strategic fit and alignment of particularities and priorities of both collaborating parties.

The recent emphasis on collaborative research strategies is a reflection of how social policy in this country has been developed, i.e. mainly through a “push-pull” process. Whereas traditionally, Maori were involved in providing information during the main phase of the research, now they are increasingly encouraged to participate in the entire project, i.e. from conceptualization and planning through to implementation and evaluation. This is because experience has shown that the most successful social policies are those that have been produced as a result of having effectively engaged key Maori stakeholders throughout the research process. It is also a reflection of how proactive Maori have been in making demands about the nature and extent of their interests in research and policy making. An example is the area of resource management where key Maori concepts are outlined in the legislation (Resource Management Act 1991) and as a consequence certain activities require, not only a consideration of Maori customs, but also Maori participation by way of mandatory consultation and collaboration. Maori efforts to influence the control and management of natural resources are in part demonstrated in such legislative provisions. In general, **collaborative research programmes and strategies are good news for Maori**; they imply a sharing of resources, skills, knowledge, research outcomes, and perhaps most importantly a foundation for an optimistic and shared future.

Two key issues that necessarily arise in a collaborative research process and are most likely to confound the arrangement are “representation” and “comprehensivity.” These issues give rise to questions such as, “Who are the best people to involve?” “What is the basis of their representation?” “How comprehensive is their advice?” “Is a mandating process necessary?” “What is the best way of validating the information given?” “What are the power and resource issues?”

A sound relationship with Maori participants and understanding of them is essential for any of these questions to be resolved. Furthermore, if Maori are collaboratively involved, then one would expect them to provide not only answers to these questions but also solutions for applying the information to the research process. In doing so, the transfer of knowledge, skills, resources and responsibilities between the research parties can be assured. The ultimate challenge for social researchers is to achieve an **equitable transfer of resources between collaborating parties** by recognising the power and resource differentials between them.

Social researchers must understand the political, economic and social dynamics of Maori communities, their leadership arrangements and priorities in order for their research to have any relevance and value to Maori. The social and economic divide that exists within Maori communities alone is becoming more apparent. For example, one just needs to walk down certain streets in Papakura where Maori are concentrated and compare their experience with Maori living two blocks away in the same city – the differences are stark. This requires researchers to examine the full raft of socio-economic, cultural and political factors and understand the connections between them and how they work within a given period and across generations to collectively shape the different realities of Maori communities.

Another matter that is rarely discussed is the issue of **“research by Maori for Maori”**. With so much emphasis and attention given to policy related and Treaty research, Maori rarely have the luxury to contemplate research that falls outside of those areas. For example, Te Onehou Phillis' biography of her father Eruera Manuera, recently won a Montana special book award. The award was special because a new category had to be created for publications in te reo Maori and Phillis was given the award because her work was outstanding. Phillis' research produced an extremely rich source of Maori social history, although it might never have been published had willing Maori sources and voluntary contributors not stepped up to provide finance. The point here is that unless Maori research, particularly that which is written by Maori in te reo, is encouraged and supported by mainstream social science, an important dimension of social history and culture in this country will remain untold.

## **5. Plurality, collaboration and research ethics**

### **Peter Jackson**

Embedded in the classical western approach to research are notions such as objectivity, value-free methodology, and an individualistic mindset toward research design and ownership of the findings. Within my field of work, the discipline of psychology, the western approach has never worked that well, even when the focus has been individual psychophysical variables. It has certainly not worked well where the focus involves inter-actor variables within a social context. The findings of such research have tended to be artificial, contextually narrow, and have problems of generalisability.

Aside from the issues surrounding the validity of the western research approach, this approach has an interesting ethical dimension. The key motivation in the ethical



dimension of research is the elimination of (or at least the significant reduction of) possible risk of harm to participants, where the harm may be physical, emotional, psychological, social or cultural. In general, harm includes distress at any level, such as pain, stress, emotional distress, fatigue, embarrassment, cultural dissonance and cultural exploitation. In addition, **the anticipated outcomes of the research should well outweigh any possible harm**. This is true for all research involving human or non-human participants. Further, in the case of human participants, the principles of informed consent and the right to withdraw are essential parts of the methodology.

As one moves from research involving strictly individual variables (e.g. a psychophysical variable such as just noticeable differences in colour perception, or single subject designs as in the behaviourist strand) the problems of methodology, hence ethics, increase. This is especially true where social and cultural factors enter as key variables. To give this some focus, we can consider a piece of research that involves both Maori participants and Maori culture. The concept of *tika* is a major consideration here, where this term derives from the word *tika* entailing notions such as right, true, correct and just. Aspects such as informed consent, making available research findings and ownership of the research, assume great importance. There is a need, at the outset for consultation with participants in the research aims, design and choice of methodology. **A methodology that doesn't respect Maori values is harmful** in the sense that it fails to acknowledge the offence that might be given to the participants in the research. Thus, not only might the methodology be inappropriate, hence the findings invalid, but the participants may sustain harm.

**Kaupapa Maori based research has challenged western approaches to research and their ethical considerations.** It challenges the locus of power and control in relation to research issues such as initiation, benefits, representation and accountability. Kaupapa Maori based research is collectivistic, and oriented toward benefiting all research participants. Acknowledging the notions underpinning kaupapa Maori based research demands a fresh approach to ethical issues in social research.

## 6. Kaupapa Maori research, feminist research and a plurality of stories

### Tricia Laing

Feminist scholarship has championed and elaborated a series of ideas about knowledge that have significant implications for the ethic of social research. Many of these ideas are also constitutive of kaupapa Maori research ethics. This is a situation unique to Aotearoa New Zealand and we need to consider what we are doing when these ideas are constituted as Maori ones.

The ideas include:

- Everyday life experience is a legitimate focus for social research;
- Knowledge is gendered;
- Knowledge is culturally diverse;
- Knowledge production is a political activity;
- How we know, what we know and what we say about knowledge is positioned;
- The stories, we tell, listen to and write about everyday life, challenge the authority of dominant discourses that tend to essentialize 'Western knowledge', 'Western Medicine' or 'Maori culture/Pakeha culture'.

With these ideas in mind we think about and practice research ethics in new and different ways.

- **We recognise that harm is contextually defined;** that no one discourse has the authority to say what constitutes harm. Conversely we work towards understanding how research can maximise the benefit to both the research participants and the researchers.
- **We negotiate the intentions of the research projects,** and also the intended purposes for which the research will be used. What is its relevance and who will benefit?
- **The designs of research projects are negotiated locally among the people who will be involved, including researchers, research participants, stakeholders in, and funders of, research.**
- **We are clear about where the researchers and the research participants position themselves** in order to be involved in the research and we document these relationships.
- **We also document the political contexts and power relationships** which produce the research and which the research produces.
- **The research participants need to be active partners in research** at all levels because as human beings our health and well-being depends on understanding and knowing about the worlds around us and how to participate in them successfully.

A limitation attributed to this ethical approach is that the researchers are too close to the research participants and the research is therefore not objective. The implications are that the participants are not represented accurately, and the validity and reliability of the research is therefore questionable. And, how can questionable research benefit the research participants or the researchers? A feminist response is that the **research is more strongly objective in so far as its results can be understood and assessed in the context of the explicitly described relationships and conditions that produced it** (Harding, 1991; Harding, 1998; Narayan & Harding, 2000).

A political concern for researchers is that, if we take this collaborative approach that highlights plurality, then as a result everyone will become researchers, and we will lose our social status as ‘experts’. Another way of understanding this conundrum is to recognise that if everyone had better understandings about research then this would make our jobs a great deal easier. A large part of undertaking collaborative research in culturally diverse settings involves dispelling the myths about research and reassuring people of the value that research can have for all of us.

One of the misconceptions that beginning researchers sometime have about this approach is that research is about nothing more than ensuring the voices of the research participants are heard through the research. This is a response to stories about research participants complaining, often justifiably, that the researchers are the only people to benefit from the research. **In the approach that I am proposing both research participants and researchers benefit from the research, and the benefits to each are explicitly understood and discussed at all stages of a project.**

Parry and Doan (1994) describe the predicament of “cross-road families” in a postmodern world and suggest how “the postmodern family therapist of narrative persuasion” can play a role in “assisting families in finding ways of making their

members feel connected meaningfully and pleasurably to one another” (1994:29). Members of cross-road families “go forth to and return from [the] different worlds” of school, paid and unpaid work, or benefit receipt where “different languages are spoken, different stories told, and different selves employed.” Among these diverse worlds no one dominant discourse, such as the medical model or the morality of Christianity, holds sway. Where there is no unifying dominant discourse “the only recourse parents have in dealing with the problems their children face in coping with the only world they have ever known are the stories they bring out of their own experiences; these, like all small narratives, entirely lack authority” (1994:26). From Parry and Doan’s point of view, when anyone in a family questions the legitimacy of a personal story they are “conducting an act of terrorism”. This is terrorism because **“when one person tries to silence the legitimate voice of another this is done invariably by throwing into question that person’s only resources for discerning reality”** (1994:27).

Parry and Doan’s insight in the context of family therapy seems to me to be transferable to research writing. For example:

- Jamie Belich slaps our feminist historians in *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders* (1996);
- Mason Durie in *Whaiora : Maori Health Development* (1998) leaves out the pakeha women who throughout our history have contributed to Maori health development; and
- Karen Sinclair in *Prophetic Histories: The People of the Maramatanga* (2002) writes about the Maramatanga as if she was the only non-Maori who interacts with this prophetic movement.

Can we describe these as ‘acts of terrorism’ in Parry and Doan’s terms? We are all the losers when stories are not told in their full complexity and where there is no discussion of the politics of knowledge production relevant at the time.

Some of the Maori people who contributed to Judith Binney’s, *Redemption Songs: A Life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* (1997) told me that they left important information out when they told her their stories. Yet this partial sharing of our stories is something we all do. In this case it does not detract from the complexity of a story that values the diversity of our cultures and the worlds we construct out of our interactions with them.

Listening to each other’s stories and exploring the relationship between them in a process of collaborative research using ethical guidelines that value plurality has the potential to benefit us all, contributing to our health and well-being, and the richness and complexity of our lives.

## 7. A shifting context - funding frameworks

### David Thorns

In 1991 the strategic framework within which Government priorities were set was changed with the formation of a Ministry of Research Science & Technology to provide policy advice and a new organisation to carry out the dispersal of public good funding – the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. This structure

reflected the view that the advice functions, funding allocations and providing of services (research) should be split to enable greater competition and avoid provider capture. Alongside these changes in the allocation of research and science funding were the disestablishment of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and the creation of the Crown Research Institutes. The first set of science priorities under this new arrangement were set in 1991/2 financial year. These have been subject to a number of reviews, the most extensive being under the Foresight programme, begun in 1997 and reflected in the document *Blueprint for Change* (1999)

**The Social Sciences entered this new era of funding somewhat on the back foot.** The CRI created (the NZ Institute of Social Research and Development) developed out of the small group of social scientists employed within the former DSIR. It had a short life and by 1995 was discontinued (Hawke, 1995). The Social Science Research Fund, administered by the Department of Social Welfare, provided the previous “funding regime” within the public realm, for social scientists. However, this was a relatively small fund, providing marginal cost funding on a short-term project basis. Within the new FRST structure the social science “output classes” were 4 in number and covered history, society and culture, relationships and well-being, political and economic relationships and education, knowledge and training. In the 1992/3 funding year FRST provided in total \$1.5 million for these output classes (MoRST, 1992). By the mid 1990s this area was consolidated into “output 13” which in 1995/6 contained 5.2 million (FRST, 1996). This was at the time 2.0% of the PGSF (\$257m). By the end of the decade, before the next set of changes, the level of funding for society and culture had risen to \$8.9million that comprised 3.1% of the overall fund (\$290m). The decade of the 1990s thus saw the demise of a dedicated CRI for the social sciences and only a very limited improvement in the amount of money available for public good social research.

**The Foresight process led to a new framework based on “investment” rather than “outputs”** and was designed to create a “knowledge society, characterised by knowledge led innovation” (MoRST, 1999: 5). This framework provided a set of “high level goals” that were translated into a set of “strategic portfolios” within which the investment would be made. The new framework stressed the need to build strong connections with “end-users” and partnerships between public and private sectors around research and development. This focus reflects the fact that New Zealand has relatively low (compared with other OECD countries) levels of private investment in Research and Development (Tallon: 1999). The process of constructing the portfolios and shaping their priorities took place over the next year, and existing programmes funded by FRST were moved to the newly created portfolios. The next stage, which is now underway, is the “progressing” of the portfolios and reshaping as programmes end and new funding rounds take place.

For the social sciences there have been a number of issues raised by this process of research determination. The first is that of “end users”. The results of social science research could be of “use” to a large range of people in both public, voluntary and private sectors. However, the one to one relationship between end users and possible users that is favoured does not work well with the wide-ranging nature of “social research”. Thus **what has occurred is the increasing definition of “end users” as government and its various ministries.** The close connection between state funding and priorities and the definition of the research agenda raises the possibility of

limiting innovative research and closing down questions which may not be acceptable in the current political climate. Many social scientists would argue that this was the case in the latter part of the 1990s when the shift took place to emphasising “relevance” in the FRST allocation process rather than giving equal weight to research quality and relevance.

The move from an “output” funding model in the 1990s to an investment and “outcome” model in the last few years poses a further problem. To assess potential outcomes funding organisations need to consider how the research, before it is actually done, will be used by defined endusers and thus “make a difference”. Social science researchers, because of the disparate nature of their end users, find this particularly difficult outside of central and local government. Here there is the further problem that government ministries and agencies often do not have a clearly structured research or policy agenda. Finally, the “outcome/end user” model seems designed primarily around a view that sees research leading directly into applications that add value in a commercial way, reflecting the dominance of a science/industry model. This may not be the best way to assess the benefits of much social research.

**The funding levels for social science research under the new model do not appear to have increased.** They have stayed static in dollar terms, which means that they have declined in their purchasing power. In 2000/1 the “social goal” received a total \$47.2m of investment (MoRST, 2001a). However, this included \$38.4M Health Research Council, \$4.5m Maori Knowledge and Development and \$4.3 Social Research. (MoRST, 2001a). However, not all or even a majority of HRC money is directed to social science health related research. In the 2002/3 budget the level of funding for Social Research has stayed the same at \$4.34m and the total “social goal” has fallen to \$44.07 as a consequence of the shift of Maori Knowledge and Development to the Knowledge Goal (MoRST, 2002).

Additional research funding is available through the Marsden fund, established during the 1990s to provide for fundamental research. The fund in 2000/1 stood at \$25.8 million. The fund is administered by the Royal Society and the programmes are peer reviewed and allocation is by Panels and a Marsden Council. The fund is heavily oversubscribed and the chance of funding runs at about 10% - well below that of similar funds overseas. Within the Marsden Fund the Social Science investment is of the order of around \$800,000 per year - about 8 to 9 programmes.

The key issues that have emerged from the new structures are:

- **Inadequate level of funding for Social Science Research.** Under the Labour/Alliance Government 1999-2002 there has been an increased level of demand for “evidence based social research”. The lack of increased investment through the contestable funding system has limited the ability of social researchers to respond to these signals. The social science community has often been criticised for being fragmented and disorganised. However, the response to last year’s CORE bidding which produced a number of well-constructed and nationally linked bids from the social science community indicated clearly that this is a myth.

- The need to develop **different forms of research activity**. The funding changes of the 1990s and the environment developing at present have privileged programme rather than project based research. Such research encourages larger groupings and teams that cross institutional boundaries. This has meant researchers have had to develop new skills and capacities. The competitive nature of the research environment that was created through the contestable system has in some ways militated against the development of this wider cross-institutional activity.
- Challenges to the boundaries that get created around the funding instruments and processes, for example, the construction of the SPO, PO, framework and the ease or difficulty by which cross portfolio funding can work. In the development of the Portfolios attention was drawn to the need for more social research input. However, the **absence of capacity** has in some cases led to existing research players simply acquiring a limited research capacity rather than opening the area to real engagement with the social sciences research community.
- **Challenges to the training and development of social science researchers** to enable them to work in cross-disciplinary, cross cultural and team settings. This may also mean re-examining the nature of our disciplinary boundaries
- For social researchers located in the tertiary education sector, the proposed changes in funding and concerns that Government may want to “steer” research to reflect current **government priorities** raises issues around how research questions are defined. For vigorous debate and genuinely creative research there needs to be the possibilities for the full spectrum from “theoretically based” through to “applied” work and for real debate about the setting of the questions and what constitutes “evidence”.
- Danger that the focus upon “end users” concerns will mean that **researchers are seen as primarily technicians** who provide data rather than as partners in the creation of robust debate and knowledge about the changing nature of our increasingly pluralistic society.

## 8. National and international linkages

### Rosemary Du Plessis

Aotearoa New Zealand is a small nation state with limited resources for investment in research. Nationally and internationally there is increasing recognition of the need for “**critical mass**” in order to produce new knowledge that can inform decision-making at national, regional and local levels. **Researchers with overlapping interests need to be more effectively linked**. Given current information technologies, critical mass does not have to be located in one place - virtual research teams, chatshops, collaborative think tanks can be established regionally, nationally and internationally.

Social scientists need to think about how to sustain the momentum established by the initiatives developed in response to the opportunities presented by the Centres for Research Excellence (CoREs). While social scientists had limited success in the bids for CoREs, the process of constructing research teams did highlight **important**

**synergies between programmes** being pursued in different parts of the country. How can these connections be advanced? What factors inhibit these linkages and how can they be addressed? What models do we have of cross institutional collaborations that are operating successfully without the funding initiatives associated with the CoREs? What can others learn from these initiatives?

Planning for the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Conference was a spur to the establishment of data-bases listing social science and social policy researchers in government agencies, local government, private contractors, tertiary education institutions and the voluntary sector. The RSNZ Social Science Committee has also been working to establish and update a contact list incorporating social scientists, teaching and training programmes and professional associations. This has been developed to enhance our communication with other social scientists, but it has highlighted the difficulties of accomplishing this cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral communication. Each organisation attempting to mount a conference or workshop aimed at these cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary linkages should not have to start from scratch, but should be able to access updated email distribution lists. Social scientists would benefit from the establishment of opt-on list-serv and snail mail lists that extend beyond the life of a particular conference, workshop or national initiative.

In the last Budget the Ministry of Social Development was funded to work with other social agencies to improve communication relating to social policy research and evaluation. This includes the resources to **establish a website linking the many stand-alone websites that provide information about policy relevant social research**. It will also increase the range of social policy relevant research that is available via the Internet. Such a site could also be a key place for posting information about conferences, workshops and visits from social scientists from outside New Zealand. Graduate students pursuing postdoctoral opportunities or research assistant work could post information about their research interests and electronic chatshops could be organised. Some work has been done to update the RSNZ website with respect to communication with social scientists, but much more remains to be done to make this site user-friendly for social scientists. This site could also be set up to link more effectively with other websites providing access to information about social science research initiatives in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The smallness of the social science sector in this country has meant that we sometimes rely heavily on personal networks and put too little effort into systematic strategies to ensure better communication among those with related research interests. The current system can work well for established researchers, but less well for newcomers from elsewhere, or newly qualified researchers. At a national level we could foster **more systematic links between various “actors” in the matrix**. Those linkages could be both electronic and face-to-face. The recent budget initiative relating to social policy research and evaluation includes a component to establish an exchange programme to operate nationally and internationally to improve access to a range of expertise. This is consistent with the MoRST Social Science Reference Group’s recommendations for more postgraduate student internships and secondments between the tertiary education sector (nationally and internationally) and government agencies (MoRST, 2001b). As someone who is currently experiencing the stimulation and ‘stretch’ of such linkages, I am convinced of the value of this strategy for connection between sectors. These secondments should, however, not just be an

initiative of government agencies. **Tertiary education organisations have much to gain from incorporating researchers from government agencies into their research and teaching programmes** for six months to a year. Neil Lunt and Carl Davidson endorse the need for these connections in a recent paper examining social science research capacity. They also argue that tertiary educators need to think about how they and their students can use their skills to engage with the research questions posed by government agencies (Lunt & Davidson, 2002).

Government agencies and tertiary institutions have often been less proactive and imaginative actors than cross-sector, cross-disciplinary initiatives like the Association of Social Science Researchers, the Australasian Evaluation Society and the New Zealand Association for Social Impact Assessment. For many social researchers, especially those in government agencies and private research organisations, these professional associations are often the key routes to the forms of connection and collaboration that were identified as critical for social science in the 1970s (Fougere & Orbell, 1975).

Another possible initiative to encourage linkages across a diverse sector is the creation of a cross-sector, post-disciplinary peer reviewed electronic **New Zealand Social Science Research journal**. This journal would give priority to publishing submissions that had an explicitly multi-disciplinary orientation and attended to the methodological challenges of “boundary-defying” work. The RSNZ Social Science Committee is currently considering the possibility of such a journal and exploring alternative sources of funding. This journal would not actively compete for submissions or readership with established social science journals, but attempt to chart a new course.

While some social scientists have focused on local and national networks, many have actively pursued linkages with colleagues outside Aotearoa New Zealand or brought these linkages with them when taking up positions in this country. However, some of these linkages have been relatively ad hoc and depend on the networks, career paths and personal intellectual interests of individuals. They are the outcome of linkages established through graduate work in other countries, conference attendance or the outcome of visiting websites associated with a particular field of interest. Some global linkages arise out of invitations to serve on the boards of journals published outside New Zealand, or the connections between national professional associations and international associations. **How can these linkages benefit a wider community of social scientists?** Can social scientists who have forged these linkages extend the networks of others? And how can social scientists at different levels in their careers make better use of the sources of funding currently available for consolidating international connections?

In 2002 the RSNZ received a one off contract via the MoRST ISAT Linkages Fund to bring social scientists to the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Conference and present papers in other environments during their visit to Aotearoa New Zealand. This resource was used to fund visits by Dr Sandra Nutley (University of St Andrews) and Professor Lois Bryson (RMIT and University of Newcastle). How can information about potential sources of funding for international visits be better distributed in this country? How can joint efforts to invite particular visitors to visit a variety of institutions be facilitated? How can invitations to those outside New Zealand avoid



assumptions about the superiority of ‘overseas’ insights and genuinely lead to the development of new insights and directions in social research in this context? And how can innovation and unique methodological insights developed here be promoted internationally? **Are the mechanisms that currently deliver these linkages in the social science adequate, and if not, what can be done to enhance them?** And does new effort in this field always demand more resources, or can it be achieved in other ways?

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